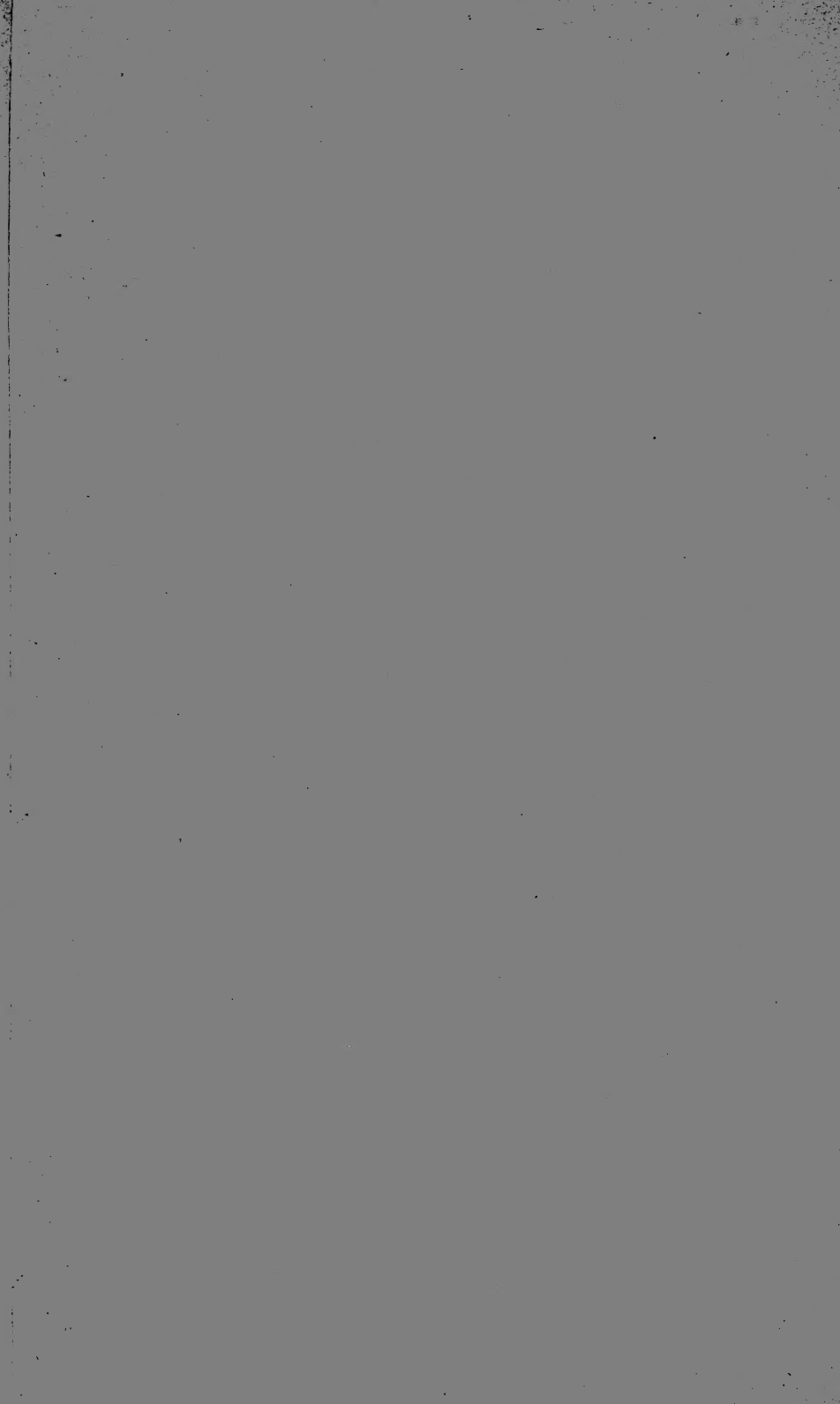


Nov. 6 1899

Newport Natural History
Society

From J. M. R. Lenthall

NEWPORT
NATURAL HISTORY
SOCIETY



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

29
ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS OF INLAND FISHERIES,

MADE TO THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

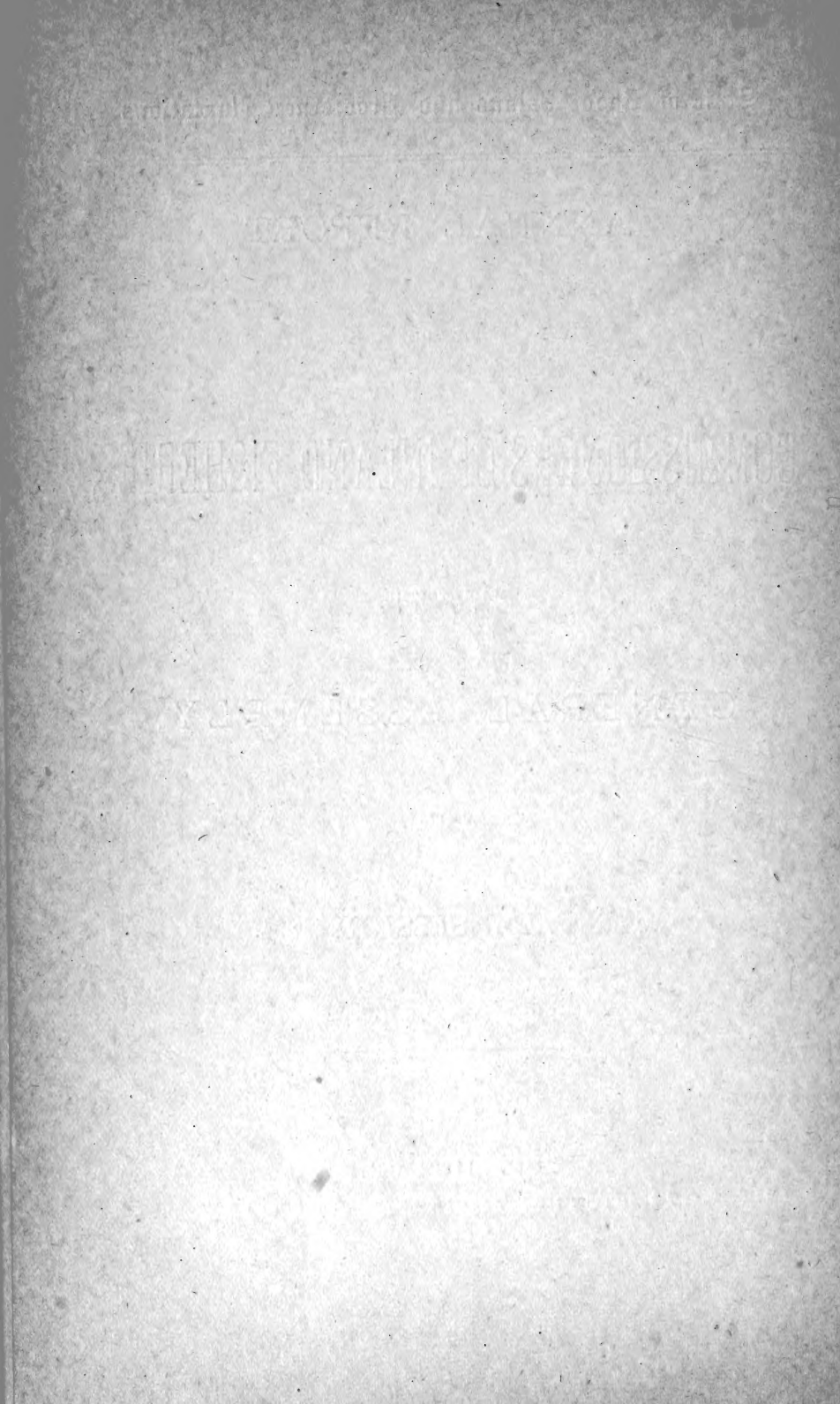
AT ITS

JANUARY SESSION, 1894.

PROVIDENCE:

E. L. FREEMAN & SON, STATE PRINTERS.

1894.



REPORT.

To the Honorable the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, at its January Session, 1894:

The Commissioners of Inland Fisheries herewith present their annual report for the year 1893.

BLACK BASS.

This valuable food fish continues to increase in the waters of our State where introduced, and many large catches have been reported to us.

TROUT.

Seven thousand (7,000) yearling trout were purchased and apportioned out to applicants for them, to be placed in various waters of the State.

The Commissioners have had but few reports of any considerable catches the past season, and, from general reports, consider it the poorest season yet. This is the third consecutive season of low streams during the summer and fall months.

TAUTOG.

We have a few reports from line fishermen of large catches in the upper waters of the bay during the spring fishing, but many of good catches in the fall were reported.

SCUP.

No large catches of scup by line fishermen have been reported to us, although large quantities have been reported as caught in the traps at the entrance to the bay. The catch a little below last season.

BLUE FISH.

Only a few have been taken this season by line in upper waters of the bay, and have been scarce in the waters of this State the last season; indeed very few were to be seen except at Block Island, where they had a fair catch, and we understand that there was good fishing for them along the coast west and south of us.

SQUITEAGUE.

This fish was taken quite plentifully off Warwick Light, north end of Prudence and at Hope Island by parties fishing for them expressly; some parties fishing for bottom fish report their taking that bait.

BUTTER FISH

still remain with us in good numbers. These are taken entirely by traps.

MACKEREL

have been quite abundant, but most of them of small size. The bullseye variety has been quite plenty.

STRIPED BASS

have been scarce, and as this is the most valued of all game fish, it is much to be regretted.

SEALS.

The presence of seals in the bay last season was remarkable, we have never known so many to be observed in our waters in one season.

Captain Chandler tells me that he counted 23 in sight at one time, and others have noted their presence in large numbers. These hair seals are great fishermen, and it takes quite a number to make a meal for them; what would be required to satisfy them it would be difficult to calculate.

Account of fish and lobsters shipped in 1893, from Newport, R. I., by Old Colony Steamboat Co.:

Month.	Fish.	Lobsters.
January.....	5 Barrels	3 Barrels.
February.....	26 "	
March.....	82 "	
April.....	60 "	6 "
May.....	7,844 "	197 "
June.....	8,840 "	305 "
July.....	3,435 "	356 "
August.....	1,622 "	296 "
September.....	861 "	170 "
October.....	1,102 "	39 "
November.....	449 "	6 "
December.....	126 "	21 "
Total.....	24,452	1,399

The following is the amount of fish and lobsters shipped over the Old Colony line for twelve years, from Newport:

1882.....	12,514 Barrels.
1883.....	13,874 "
1884.....	20,301 "
1885.....	18,421 "
1886.....	18,439 "
1887.....	17,491 "
1888.....	16,194 "
1889.....	21,353 "
1890.....	11,583 "
1891.....	20,236 "
1892.....	28,955 "
1893.....	25,851 "

LOBSTERS.

The undersigned would respectfully report that under the Act of Jan., 1893, he has the last year secured the eggs from 295 lobsters, which were set free in the waters of the State when hatched.

Thus has he caused to be returned to the water four million of young life that cannot fail to have some effect upon the numbers in the waters, if but a small per cent. of them reach maturity.

It is hoped that some plan may be devised whereby all the eggs from all the lobsters taken in this State may be secured and returned to the waters after hatching.

J. M. K. SOUTHWICK,

Chairman Fish Com.

THE CONVENTION AT NEW YORK.

The most notable event of the past year relating to the fisheries was the conference held in New York City, Dec. 13th and 14th.

It was composed of Fish Commissioners from all the Northern Atlantic States, and others interested in the coast fisheries.

This State was represented by J. M. K. Southwick and Mr. George N. Bliss on the part of the Fish Commissioners, and by Daniel T. Church, James Church, William A. Brightman, and John Lewis as interested in the fisheries.

The call to this conference assumed that there was a growing scarcity of edible fish all along the coast.

That the cause was the use of nets.

The remedy the restriction of nets.

This left nothing for the convention to do but agree upon uniform restrictive laws as suggested in the call.

As it was proposed to question the assumed fact, that fish were diminished, the meeting was conducted in a free and impartial manner.

In behalf of those who called the conference it was shown that with hook and line fish could not be taken in as large number as formerly on the fishing grounds.

This, it was claimed, was evidence of a general diminution of sea fishes.

On the other hand it was shown by statistics of fisheries, of transportation companies, and of the markets, that a very large increase of edible fish found their way to the markets from traps.

This is claimed as proof that no diminution has occurred.

If it is admitted that both sides proved their case, and we believe they did, so far as relates to the catch of fish in the different ways indicated, the conclusion is inevitable that the failure is local, not general, and must apply to specific fish, not to the ocean fishes generally.

The wandering ocean fishes like the squiteague, the blue fish, the menhaden and the mackerel are too capricious in their movements to count upon their presence anywhere with any degree of certainty. To attribute their absence in a locality to a scarcity in the ocean is a fallacy that was clearly demonstrated the past season, in the failure of weak fish in Barnegat Bay, while on the Jersey coast they were very plenty, and on the south coast of New England they were more abundant than ever before known.

To give satisfactory reasons why the hook and line men, who stated their experience, found less fish than formerly is perhaps beyond the power of man; still there are causes at work that doubtless affect more or less the anadromous fishes that visit us, and seek pure water in upper streams to deposit their spawn, but who, if they succeed in overcoming obstructions in the rivers, find the waters poisoned by sewerage, chemicals, and other deleterious substances destructive to the young fish life. These impurities are carried down stream by tides and deposit over the bottom, and to this is added the mud from dredging that is dumped in the channels and lodges in the eddies, covering vegetable and animal life that would attract fish. Then there are changes effected by

natural causes, storms sometimes scour the bottom of vegetable life, or cover it with sand or mud.

At times the fish will not take the hook from some cause, it may be because gorged by the abundance of normal food, they will not be tempted to take the hook, let it be baited ever so well.

The result of this meeting was the bringing face to face of the parties representing both sides of the question. It can but have the effect to broaden the views of each, and lead to a more thorough study, and we trust, a better understanding, of the subject of our own fisheries.

The following observations of the fisheries, during the past year, are from the pen of Capt. E. B. Church:

"The menhaden began to show on the coast early in May this season and gave promise of being abundant; they went into Long Island Sound in the usual quantity, and into Narragansett Bay in rather more than the usual quantity; they remained in the bays until about the last of July, when they left and did not return. The early reports from Maine were very encouraging, the pound fishermen reported catching of more than ever before early in the season. But the steamers that cruised the coast failed to find any.

It is the general belief that there was a body of menhaden on the coast, but did not show up at the surface, this belief was strengthened by the appearance of a large body of these fish in Provincetown bay late in October. A large body of menhaden remained in Buzzard's Bay all summer.

The fishermen found a large body of menhaden on the outside of Long Island early in October; where they came from no one knew, they followed them down the coast as far as Brigantine shoals where most of them disappeared; some few were caught south of there, in the vicinity of the Delaware, but not many. This body of fish did much towards bringing this year's catch up, although it is still much below the average. Both in the Delaware and Chesapeake menhaden were plenty, and good catches

were made, but, on the whole, business has been unprofitable, owing to the small quantity of oil in the fish."

"Scup and sea bass were abundant on the coast during their migration, more so than for many years, but there were very few caught during the summer in the rivers and bays."

"Squiteague were very plentiful, so much so that they were hardly worth catching in traps. It is safe to say the loss of these fish from the pounds in East River was from 200 to 400 tons during the August storm."

"Blue fish were first taken this season the last of March or early in April, in the vicinity of Cape Hatteras, where a large fleet of New York smacks go to make early catches. I think there is about sixty fitted from the Fulton Market alone. They found a good body of fish, but they did not take the hook freely when first found; they came up the coast slowly, in fact, the great body of them remained south of Barnegat all summer. A fairly good school came on our coast in July, but went to the east; good catches were made in Vineyard Haven, and they are also reported in considerable numbers off Newburyport. There have not been such large numbers seen along the coast this year as there were for the last three previous years."

"There was one noticeable thing about them this year, most of them were very large."

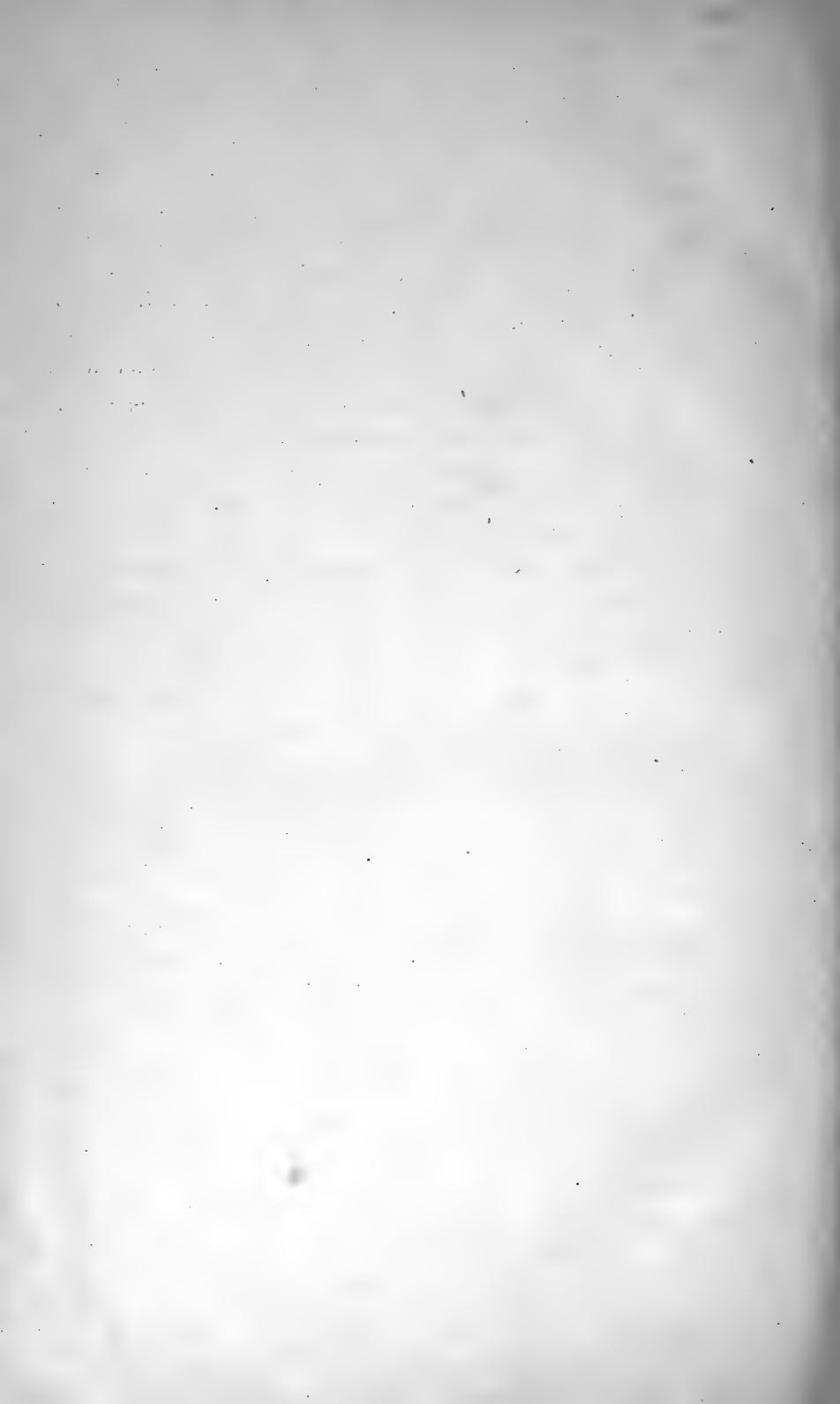
"If I dared guess on the subject, it would be that there would be less of them in 1894. Notwithstanding their young were very abundant in the waters this fall."

State of Rhode Island in account with Commissioners of Inland Fisheries:

1892.	DR.	
Dec. 31. To balance due Commissioners.....		\$53 78
1893.		
Oct. 23. " paid for yearling trout.....		230 00
" " express on trout and advertising		18 20
Dec. 8. " " printing, stamps and stationery.....		7 25
Dec. 31. " " expenses of Commissioners.....		50 35
		<hr/>
		\$359 58

1893.	CR.	
Mar. 24.	By cash from State Treasurer.....	\$53.78
Oct. 25.	“ “ “ “ “	206.85
Dec. 31.	“ balance due Commissioners.....	98.95
		<hr/>
		\$359.58

J. M. K. SOUTHWICK,
 HENRY T. ROOT,
 WILLIAM P. MORTON,
Commissioners of Inland Fisheries.









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